

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Protection

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a clear, odorless gas that is poisonous to humans and pets.

Defective furnaces, fireplace flues, and oil heaters have long been the primary cause of accidental CO poisoning.

There are *no* perceptible symptoms if an individual's CO levels are less than 10 percent. Most people are unaware that they are being exposed.

Here is what to look for:

At 10 percent levels, symptoms may mimic the flu or a cold. These may include

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Mild confusion
- Irregular breathing and/or heartbeat
- Nausea

Take note especially if everyone in the home is experiencing at least some of the symptoms, and pay particular attention if pets exhibit symptoms since animals cannot get the flu.

At levels greater than 20 percent, a person can lose consciousness, go into a coma, or die.

If CO poisoning is suspected:

- Evacuate the premises
- Get everyone into fresh air as soon as possible
- Call 9-1-1 from another location, not the premises
- Report it to your fire department, even if everyone is feeling better.

Common sources of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Furnaces
- Gas appliances which includes stoves, clothes dryers and water heaters.
- Automobiles. In many states code requires that CO be prevented from entering living spaces by lowering the garage floor below the main floor of the house and the placement of venting holes at the bottom of exterior garage walls.

How to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Have your furnace and gas appliances inspected and maintained by a qualified contractor once a year. This should be done before the start of the heating months.

In addition to professional annual checkups, periodically check your furnace. Look for these things:

- Flames should be mostly blue and steady.
- Look around the burner access doors and vents for discoloration or the build up of soot.
- Check the venting system. Broken, rusted, or soft venting can release CO indoors.
- Make sure that the furnace is free from dust, rust, or any other signs of corrosion.
- Regularly check your air filters and clean or replace them as necessary.
- Always make sure panels and grills are in place and the fan compartment door is closed when the furnace is on. Leaving them open could cause CO build-up in living areas.

Install Carbon Monoxide alarms

It is a good idea to install a CO alarm on each level of your home, and in or near each sleeping area.

Try to keep the detectors at least 20 feet from any fuel burning appliances and at least 10 feet from high humidity locations like bathrooms and kitchens. If an alarm sounds, call a professional to check your gas burning appliances.

Testing your Carbon Monoxide detector/alarm

One can determine if a CO detector/alarm is working by using special CO alarm testing devices. These devices simulate CO using a small pellet in a package. When the pellet is moistened, it releases a non-toxic gas. After a few minutes, if the alarm is properly working, the alarm should sound. Your local hardware store can also assist you with information on checking these devices.